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### **SBoo27 - Criminal Procedure - Restorative Justice Program SUPPORT**

Victim Offender Mediation has been practiced in the United States since 1978, when the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program began in Elkhart, IN. It is associated with lower recidivism rates, higher levels of restitution, and improved victim satisfaction with the criminal justice process. In December 2020, the Justice Research and Statistics Association reviewed the literature about various kinds of restorative justice, including Victim Offender Mediation (VOM) and Victim Offender Dialogue (VOD), and concluded that “Synthesis research on restorative justice practices has focused on two primary sets of outcomes: recidivism for offenders and outcomes for victims such as satisfaction and restoration. Results are promising for both, regardless of whether the program targets juvenile or adult offenders, or low-level or serious (even violent) crimes.”<sup>1</sup> It is important for Maryland to recognize the growing body of research demonstrating the positive impact of restorative justice by initiating a Restorative Justice Program.

As a parole advocate, the need for a more collaborative approach to justice is apparent to me in my day to day work. I get to know the people I advocate for, and in many cases, see incredibly positive changes in them as they gain understanding of their crime and seek rehabilitation. Unfortunately, I often see victims who are trapped in the day of the crime with no way to see the remorse or growth in the person who harmed them. VOM/VOD is one way that a victim might choose to retake control of their process and get what they need to move forward.

While I would never suggest that VOM/VOD is the right solution for everyone, I would also never want to deny a victim access to the type of support they want for their healing process. This program does not seek to replace the current criminal justice system, nor is it part of the judicial or parole process - it just gives a victim an innovative choice to heal on their own terms. These same victims will be contacted repeatedly to engage in the adversarial process by the State’s Attorney’s Office and the Parole Commission as various hearings approach. Adding an option for restorative justice does not inconvenience the victim or intrude on their life any more than the current process, it merely empowers them to make their own decision about their process.

Currently there are many legal barriers set up to prevent restorative conversations from happening, and there is no safe space where a professional can facilitate a victim-centered approach. SBoo27 will open the door to choice and possibility. Please support a victim’s right to choose their future by supporting this legislation.

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<sup>1</sup> Bailey Maryfield, M.S., Roger Przybylski, M.S., and Mark Myrent, Research on Restorative Justice, JRSA, December 2020 [jrsa-research-brief-restorative-justice.pdf](https://www.jrsa.org/research-brief-restorative-justice.pdf)